surprising that "outsiders" (even well-intentioned ones, which Mr. Brown might not have been) have difficulty accepting that there must be a discrepancy, sometimes an enormous one, between their understanding of the Asylum, based on a visit in broad daylight, and an inmate's based on confinement day and night. It is perhaps more surprising, though not less logical, that inmates like Mrs. Brown, have difficulty accepting outsiders' difficulty.

Even if he had wanted to, he could not have known what it was like to live in one of the wards, to sleep in one of their unlit 6 X 10 foot cells, but the wanting itself might have done his wife some good. It might have been hard for either of them to accept the limits of the other's knowledge, but it would have been hardest of all for her to accept that it might not have made any difference what he knew. Perhaps she ultimately preferred to believe that people could not imagine what it was like to be confined in Queen Street Asylum. She seems to end up with a version of Pascal's wager in reverse, because it involves not affirming "god" -- ie., authority -- but denying him to some extent, limiting his responsibility, even his power of imagination, not in order to enjoy an afterlife should there be one, but in order to make an overwhelming present endurable. Usually our confinement to one sensibility is seen as just that, a limitation, but in the context of confinement to the Asylum it seems to have provided, for some, a measure of absolution. It made it easier to forgive. Things could be that bad.

In a letter to Dr. Herriman dated April 10 1910, Miss Dickens (admitted for the seventh or eighth time in 1910) describes how she was jailed in May of 1896 and abused by the Matron, Miss Fraser, who "banged my head on the iron railing of the cot." Her head still hurts and she asks Herriman to "trepann [sic] the place." She writes Dr. Herriman from "Queen St. Asylum," on Sunday April 10 1910, because "it will do me a lot of good to tell you somethings I have thought about a great deal." Because of headache she declines to discuss a dream she mentioned, but this is probably the subject of her letter below. She must have waited till she was out of the Asylum to relate it, because she felt it was too controversial, and embarrassing.

Her letter is mainly a discussion of masturbation, or "self-abuse," which she declares "is the cause of very much insanity." At the same time not all masturbators "are guilty of a vile sin"; some are "the victims of a nervous